

"Oh, Lily," said her mother, wearily, "won't ye put them spreads up? The minister's wife was here 'th some folks from town ez 'knowed ez they wanted ter see the weavin'. I ain't had no time to git 'em put up."

"Did they buy any?" asked Lily, standing tense and unmoving in the doorway.

"No," quietly. Then, with a note of appeal in her voice, for the hurt heart cried out to confess its hurt and be comforted, "I reckon ez they ain't sissen fur town folks."

"Oh, 'tain't that, mother!" cried Lily, flinging into the kitchen and standing with her back braced against the wall, in a defiant way she had at times, "Can't you see that they're ugly?" she went on, "Lily! That's what they are. I 'eard 'em talkin' jes now down the path. They called them hidjus. They said it set their teeth on edge. Of course they wouldn't buy 'em. Who'd want such a lot o' hidjus huses as them?"

Lily was quivering, but her mother scarcely grasped the fact. She was looking with shrinking eyes at the girl, who, with a smothered exclamation, flung out of the room as she had flung into it and began folding the despised coverlets.

Mrs Beacock stood motionless. The fork with which she had been turning the bacon dropped from the hand that hung nerveless at her side. She picked it up and turned blindly toward the stove, putting her hand to her throat a moment as if it pained her. Then, mechanically, she pushed the frying-pan to the back of the stove and stirred the potatoes, which were adding to the tumultuous sound of sizzling.

Dinner, that noon was an orgy of such unwanted freedom on the part of the younger Beacocks that the unusual silence of the elders was much more than counterbalanced. The meal was late, and as soon as it was over the children hurried off to school. Lily went without a word, the storm-cloud still in her eyes.

When they had gone, Mrs Beacock sat still for a long time, staring at the ugly wreck of what, at its best, had been a most unesthetic meal. The quality of a headache, however, is not turned, chameleon-like, to the colour of the circumstances the eyes look upon. It can be tragic even when one sits staring at scraps of bacon being slowly imprisoned in the grip of cold grease.

And Mrs Beacock's heart did ache. It was the ache of the mother who is proud of her child, and presses that pride to her bosom, even though, wonderful flower that it is, it has thorns that wound. Lily was her first-born. Sixteen years of love and longing were summed up in Lily. She was to be, in fact, what her mother had been in only the wildest of dreams. She was to have a richer life, an unbound soul. It was in Lily's future that her mother, who had walked in darkness, saw a great light.

Blindly she had willed these things, blindly toiled and prayed for them, without ever realising what gulfs she might be opening between her heart and her heart's desire. Even if she had seen the abyss there, black and impassable, she would not have turned back. She thought she did see it now. The revelation about the coverlets had gone farther than the

mere wounding of her pride. It had shown her a gulf, and Lily on the other side. She sat at the mossy table and stared at the scraps of bacon, but she was looking into the depths of that gulf.

It must have been an hour after the family had gone that someone tapped at the door. Mrs Beacock looked up with a start. It was the minister's wife. Mrs Beacock tried to get up, but she felt as if there was no Mrs Beacock at all from the waist down.

"There! Please! Don't get up. You're not anywhere over that miserable fever yet!" exclaimed the minister's wife.

Mrs Beacock smiled a wan smile. "Looks mighty shifless," she said, with a glance at the table. "I dunno's I ever did let the dinner things set before. I ain't feelin' myself yit."

"I should say not! You ought not to be out of bed. Now I'm going to clear off the table and wash the dishes while I tell you something. No, no!" holding Mrs Beacock down. "Ah, please!"

When the minister's wife said "please" in that tone, adamant was discovered to be water.

"You remember the tall young lady who was with me this morning," began the self-constituted maid of all work, gaily scraping the plates.

"Yes," Mrs Beacock's pale face slowly flushed a dull red.

"She wants you to make her two pairs of portieres (this summer, as soon as you are able to get to work again. Do you think you can do it, say next month?"

The red faded out of the thin face. There was a puzzled look in the eyes. The pause was so long that the minister's wife looked around.

"What does she want 'em fur?" asked Mrs Beacock, slowly.

"Why, for portieres."

"Oh, I know," quietly, "that's what she says. But she ain't a-goin' to hang up things ez ugly ez she thinks my spreads air."

The minister's wife stared.

"They air ugly," insisted Mrs Beacock. "Yew think they're ugly, don't ye?"

It was the turn of the minister's wife to flush.

"There, there!" said Mrs Beacock, with quiet dignity. "Don't yew worrry 'bout hurtin' my feelin's. I know they're ugly. Lily?"—a pause—"Lily told me."

"Lily?"

"Yes. She heard yew all a-sayin' so this morn. An' I reckon it's t'rew, t'rew. It's jest a sight o' work that'd a heap better not ben done. That's all. Only—I'd rather not make the portieres fur the young lady. Yew understand, don't ye?"

The minister's wife had a mind and a heart which worked quickly and in unison. She drew a child's low chair up beside Mrs Beacock, sat down, and took the worn, toil-stained hand.

"I do understand," she said, "and I like you better, if that's possible, than ever. Now, what do you say to that?" She laughed and put her cheek against the rough hand.

In all Mrs Beacock's life she could not remember ever having had anyone lay a check to her hand. She flushed, and a little thrill went through her.

"Those coverlets, dear Mrs Beacock, are ugly, as you put it, chiefly because they are out of style. Style is a king whom even this free republic can't seem to shake off. In fact, I rather think he

lords it over us more than over anybody else. Everything nowad-ys is in these queerish softish, die-away colours; and therefore, dear Lady of the Loom, all our fine coverlets out there are just simply useless to those who follow the fashion. That's what they are; they're useless."

The minister's wife pouted her lips dejectedly, as if the affliction were a mutual one.

"I've been meaning to talk it over with you as soon as you were well enough. You're not a bit well enough now, but because of these portieres, you see, I couldn't wait any longer. The young lady is furnishing a summer cottage and she wants them in green and white to match her other things. Dull green—that's what I said, you know. Everything's dull. I reckon that's to match the people; don't you think so? Anyway, it's to be dull green, and I've a great scheme. Let's do our own dyeing!"

"But I ben a-doin' that all along!"

"Yes, but I mean let's make our own dyes and have them good and permanent. Did not your mother do it?"

"Why, yes, she made blew outen indigo, an' brawn outen bark, an' green outen hickory, an'—"

The minister's wife clasped her hands.

"That's it! that's it! Why, Mrs Beacock, we'll have an infant industry here that will be the bouncingest baby you ever heard of!"

Mrs Beacock's face had brightened, but at the reference to babies the cloud fell again.

"Dye think, Lily—" she stopped.

"What about Lily?"

"She's found out the spreads is ugly. She'll keep on. Where's it a-goin to end?" suddenly cried the mother from the brink of her gulf.

The minister's wife turned sober in an instant. "End? End?" she repeated.

"There! you musn't pay no attention to me," said Mrs Beacock, quickly recovering from so unaccustomed a dis-

play of feeling. "I'm not myself yit."

"You're afraid of losing Lily's love and admiration? Is that it?"

"Oh, I warn't thinkin' of admiration. It's suthin' else. When yew all has childern a growin' up araound yr, yew understand."

"But of course Lily—"

Mrs Beacock interrupted with a gesture. She shook her head and slowly got to her feet.

"My eyes is open now," she said. "Lily's 'll be open pretty sune, ef they ain't already."

She got the dishpan and began putting the dishes into it. The minister's wife helped her. She said nothing more about Lily, and when the kitchen had been put to rights and Mrs Beacock had seated herself with a tired sigh on the doorstep the minister's wife went thoughtfully down the path.

When school was "out" that afternoon Lily Beacock stayed—by request. She was unconscious of having done violence to any of the rules, and this consideration, along with the storminess of her mood, put her in a finely defiant frame of mind when she was called up to the official desk. But her bravado melted when Piety said, "The minister's wife wants to see you in the parlour."

All afternoon Lily's heart had been bitter and hard and comfortless. Now, it suddenly thrilled and warmed. Her emotion seemed somehow to get into her knees and they felt stiff and awkward as she walked to the parlour door; but her heart—suddenly, with her hand on the knob, Lily remembered the coverlets. She stopped to think. Then, with her lips set in a line, she went in.

It was a long hour before she came out, the minister's wife with her. They went into the yard and to the gate together, where they stood and talked and talked; at least, the minister's wife talked.

"Have I made it plain to you?" she

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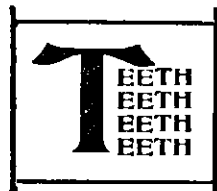
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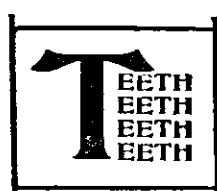
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